



## **Community Wildfire Protection Plan For At-Risk Communities Sitgreaves National Forest: Apache, Coconino, and Navajo Counties**

Residents of the small mountain communities of Arizona's Sitgreaves National Forest and of the Fort Apache Indian Reservation have personal relationships with the forest that surrounds them. The forest provides both a means of living and a quality of life. These communities—a wide-ranging mix of families, from those whose ancestors settled these mountains at the turn of the twentieth century to those who settled here at the turn of this century—recently experienced the largest wildfire in Arizona's history. These forest communities have been strong supporters of both the 10-year Comprehensive Strategy and the National Fire Plan. Motivated by the catastrophic wildfire of 2002, community leaders and residents joined to apply their collective knowledge and experience to recreate sustainable forest ecosystems both at the forest edge, where it interfaces with their daily lives and in the forest's interior. It took the commitment and hard work of many good people to pull the National Fire Plan together—from Congressional leaders to forest professionals who promoted President Bush's Healthy Forest Initiative. The *Sitgreaves Community Wildfire Protection Plan* is the direct product of a comparable process at state and local levels: the *Plan* reflects the efforts of a committed Governor and State Legislature, coupled with a strong alliance that included the State Forester, Tribal leaders, the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests Supervisor, and county and town government officials. Interested citizens and all levels of government collaborated to ensure that the components of the National Fire Plan that were to be implemented through Title I of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act were included in the *Plan*.

The true success story of the *Sitgreaves Community Wildfire Protection Plan* lies in it being Arizona's first comprehensive Community Wildfire Protection Plan to be developed and approved subsequent to the passage of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act. The *Plan* includes all at-risk communities of the Sitgreaves National Forest and associated communities of the Fort Apache Indian Reservation. Three counties, eleven communities, eight fire departments, the Arizona State Forester, the White Mountain Apache Tribe, and Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest officials, along with all interested parties from industry to environmental groups, collaborated to produce this broad, comprehensive plan. In addition to being the first of its type in Arizona, the *Sitgreaves Community Wildfire Protection Plan* was completed in just over 60 days, a truly remarkable achievement in forging consensus among the array of communities and interested citizens. They sought agreement on just what the wildfire risks are, how they might best be mitigated, how local agencies and volunteer groups might improve their responses to fire starts, what the most effective ways to reduce structural ignitability are, how the communities can most effectively reach out to their citizens with information and ideas on creating safer forest home environments, how forest health can most quickly and sustainably be obtained, and how to establish or strengthen local forest product-based industries. This collaborative process also succeeded in obtaining grants and assistance in private land treatments and in creating the White Mountain Stewardship Contract, the Forest Service's largest fuel-reduction treatment contract. The *Plan* exceeded all expectations, even serving as a model for others to follow in comprehensively planning the protection of their own forest communities. Another key success component is that since the completion of the plan, in 2005 over 3,200 acres of treatment has occurred on Forest Service lands identified in the plan as a priority. Additionally, more than 1,500 identified acres in Show Low, Pinetop-Lakeside and tribal lands have been treated. Eight Forest Health and Fire Assistance grants are being administered within the grant area, supporting private land protection efforts.